

*Georgios Gemistos Plethon: The Byzantine and the Latin Renaissance.* Jozef Matula and Paul Richard Blum, eds.

Centre for Renaissance Texts. Olomouc: Palacky University, 2014. 462 pp. n.p.

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The late Byzantine Platonist George Gemistus Pletho has long fascinated scholars. His nemesis, George Gennadius Scholarius, famously reduced to ashes in an *auto-de-fé* the unique copy of Pletho's master work, the *Laws*. So scholars have had to make do with surviving fragments and various opuscles when discussing his philosophy, religion, life, and influence. Was he a neopagan? What was the ultimate purpose of the *Laws*? How does his edition of, and commentary on, the Chaldean Oracles fit in his grand scheme? How much and in what ways did he influence Latin thought in the Renaissance? With whom did he interact at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–39), and what exactly did he teach in his school at Mistra in the Peloponnesus?

Since François Masai's celebrated *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra* of 1956, books and articles treating Pletho in whole or in part have increasingly appeared. So, not surprisingly, Pletho has also become the subject of conferences dedicated to him. The first met in Mistra in 2002 (*Proceedings of the International Congress on Pletho and His*

*Time*, Athens-Mistra [2003]). The volume under review is the result of a second such gathering, and a very timely one at that since in the last decade an extraordinary number of landmark studies have altered how we view Pletho.

The volume offers fourteen articles, all but one of which were originally presented at a conference at Palacký University, Olomouc, in May 2013. For its variety, its capturing of the latest bibliography, and its bringing together some of the most important experts, the volume makes a most valuable contribution to the study of Pletho, and overall its individual papers are of a remarkably high quality. Among the most original are John Demetracopoulos's long article proving that Heronymous Christonymos Charitonimos's *Decem Capita pro Divinitate Christi* was not directed against Islam, as traditionally believed, but against Pletho and his pagan attack on Christianity; Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker's fascinating study of how Pletho's *Chaldean Oracles* became an object of debate between Catholics, Orthodox Protestants, and religious dissidents; Sergei Mariev's penetrating analysis of how Pletho's argument on deliberation in nature played out in debate with George Gennadius Scholarius; Lázló Bene's demonstration of how Pletho's contradictory positions on fate and moral responsibility make sense once we see them from the perspective of his anti-Christian program; George Arabatzis's effective illumination as to why Pletho's *Treatise on Virtues* is so decidedly Stoic, anticontemplative, and therefore un-Neoplatonic; and Jacek Raszewski's entertaining discussion of the uses and misuses of Pletho by Greek historians and novelists of the late nineteenth century.

Then there are articles that raise intriguing possibilities or make interesting comparisons. Such are the articles of Mikhail Khorkov and Vojtěch Hladký comparing Pletho and Nicholas of Cusa, Jozef Matula's investigation of Pletho's knowledge of and attitude toward Averroes and Arab philosophy, Paul Richard Blum's sophisticated comparison of Philo's view of antiquity and modern philhellenism, Davide Amendola's attempt to connect the historical work of Pletho and Leonardo Bruni, and Walter Seitter's identification of Pletho in Benozzo Gozzoli's *Procession of the Magi*.

I myself remain unconvinced by Amendola's and Seitter's theses, but find their arguments intriguing and worth being made. I harbor stronger reservations, however, about two other articles. Niketas Siniosoglou's argument that Pletho's nationalism was not racial strikes me as anachronistic, and the one instance where he does find a racial criterion—in respect to the army—seems to me a case of overinterpretation, where the main point was the insistence on native over against mercenary troops. Wilhelm Blum's article on Pletho and the lord of Rimini, Sigismondo Pandolf Malatesta, misses some important literature: e.g., he does not know the conference *Sul ritorno di Pletone: Un filosofo a Rimini*, where, inter alia, Marco Bertozzi reported the opening of Pletho's tomb in Rimini in 1756 and the discovery of a skull of exceptional size (Biblioteca civica Gambalunga, *Sul ritorno di Pletone: un filosofo a Rimini: atti del ciclo di conferenze: sala della Cineteca comunale di Rimini, 22 novembre–20 dicembre 2002* [2003], 101n49; see Corrado Ricci, *Il Tempio malatestiano* [1925], 291, for an image of the oversized skull). And he is naively uncritical of Pope Pius II's sensationalistic portrayal of a wicked

Sigismondo, as well as the story derived from a vague line in an epithalamium of Gian Mario Filelfo in 1475 that evolved into the tale of a precocious Sigismondo inviting Pletho to take up residence in Rimini in 1439.

All in all, the editors, Jozef Matula and Paul Richard Blum, have put together a most useful volume that henceforth needs to be consulted not only by all students of Pletho, but also by scholars interested in late Byzantine culture and its relationship with the Renaissance.

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